

Russia Hands Popular Former Governor 22-Year Prison Sentence

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Former Khabarovsk region Governor Sergei Furgal. **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / TASS**

A Russian court has sentenced Sergei Furgal, the former governor of the Khabarovsk region whose arrest sparked mass protests, to 22 years in a maximum-security prison for double murder, media [reported](#) Friday.

Judge Gennady Tsoi of the Moscow region's Lyubertsy District Court handed the verdict after a jury found Furgal guilty of the charges, according to the Vedomosti business daily.

Three other defendants received prison sentences ranging from 9.5 years to 21 years.

Furgal, 52, was arrested and charged with multiple criminal offenses in 2020, just two years into his term as governor of Khabarovsk, a prosperous region on the Pacific Ocean.

He denies all charges against him.

Prosecutors had requested a 23-year prison sentence for the popular ex-governor, who won the gubernatorial seat over a candidate from the ruling United Russia party in 2018.

Related article: [Russia's Khabarovsk Region Tasted Democracy. Now Voters Feel It Was Ripped Away.](#)

Despite the charges against Furgal being widely seen as politically motivated, the jury last week agreed to hold Furgal responsible for the double murder in the early 2000s of businessman Yevgeny Zori and former police officer Oleg Bulatov, the attempted murder of businessman Alexander Smolsky, and for running a criminal gang involved in money laundering.

His initial arrest and removal from office sparked an unprecedented wave of unrest in Khabarovsk that lasted for over a year.

Following the jury's guilty verdict last week, a small group of Furgal's supporters came out to protest the decision on Khabarovsk's Lenin Square.

"You not only took away [Furgal's] freedom, but also that of the entire Khabarovsk region," one protester [said](#) in a video posted by independent media outlet Activatica.

Furgal, too, denied all charges against him in court.

"If you condemn us, the innocent, it will be a great sin because those actually guilty will walk free, breathing the fresh air [and] smiling," Furgal [said](#) in his closing statement to the jury last week.

"I'm not a great believer in Christianity, but [I do believe] we need to be acquitted so that it is we who are able to breathe the fresh air," he added.

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